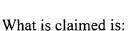
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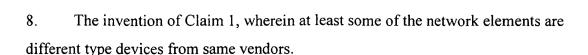
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- 1. A method for collecting traffic data in a computer network, the method comprising:
- (a) determining a protocol with which to communicate with a network element of a plurality of network elements in a computer network, each of the plurality of network elements operating with a different protocol; and
- (b) collecting traffic data from the network element using the protocol determined in (a).
- 2. The method of Claim 1 further comprising determining what traffic data should be collected from the network element.
- 3. The method of Claim 1 further comprising configuring the network element to collect the traffic data.
- 4. The method of Claim 1 further comprising analyzing the collected traffic data.
- 5. The method of Claim 4 further comprising transmitting a result of the analysis to a storage device.
- 6. The invention of Claim 1, wherein at least some of the network elements are same type devices from different vendors.
- 7. The invention of Claim 1, wherein at least some of the network elements are different type devices from different vendors.

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9. A system for collecting traffic data in a computer network, the system comprising: a plurality of network elements in a computer network, each of the plurality of network elements operating with a different protocol; and

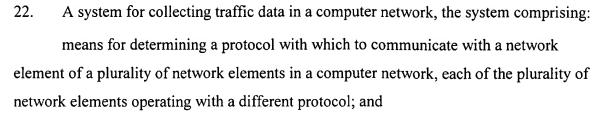
a server coupled with the plurality of network elements, the server operative to determine a protocol with which to communicate with a network element of the plurality of network elements and further operative to collect traffic data from the network element using the determined protocol.

- 10. The invention of Claim 9, wherein the server operates on network topology information of the computer network.
- 11. The invention of Claim 9, wherein the server operates on a classification schema describing traffic data to be collected from the plurality of network elements.
- 12. The invention of Claim 11, wherein the classification schema comprises at least one of a rule for classifying traffic, a specification of types of traffic data to collect, a specification of a type of processing to be performed on collected traffic data, a mechanism by which traffic data is to be transmitted, and a location to which traffic data is to be transmitted.
- 13. The invention of Claim 9, wherein the server further comprises a plurality of protocol-specific modules, each of the protocol-specific modules being operative to translate a request for traffic data into a form in accordance with a protocol of a selected network element.

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- 14. The invention of Claim 13, wherein each of the protocol-specific modules is further operative to configure a selected network element to collect traffic data.
- 15. The invention of Claim 9, wherein the server is further operative to analyze collected traffic data.
- 16. The invention of Claim 15, wherein the server is further operative to transmit a result of the analysis to a storage device remote from the server.
- 17. The invention of Claim 9, wherein the plurality of network elements is located in a point of presence in the computer network, and wherein the server is located in the point of presence.
- 18. The invention of Claim 9, wherein the plurality of network elements is located in a point of presence in the computer network, and wherein the server is located outside of the point of presence.
- 19. The invention of Claim 9, wherein at least some of the network elements are same type devices from different vendors.
- 20. The invention of Claim 9, wherein at least some of the network elements are different type devices from different vendors.
- 21. The invention of Claim 9, wherein at least some of the network elements are different type devices from same vendors.

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means for collecting traffic data from the network element using the determined protocol.